

Libraries of Washington State

Grassroots Advocacy: Writing to Your Elected Official

Letters, e-mails and faxes are often effective ways to keep your elected official informed of key issues, progress, needs and opportunities for your library system. Often legislators and other electeds view one letter as representative of broader concern or support for an issue. Consider getting others to join you in writing or to write their own letters. Good staffers pay attention to constituent feedback—after all. Encourage people you know from the electeds area or district to write to him/her as well.

To ensure your message gets read, here are a few tips.

Keep it brief: letters should **never** be longer than one page, and should be limited to one issue. Legislative aids read many letters on many issues in a day, so yours should be as concise as possible.

State who you are and what you want up front: In the first paragraph, tell your legislators that you are representing the library and identify the issue you are concerned about. If your letters are related to specific legislation, refer to it by number.

Hit your three most important points: Choose the three strongest points that will be most effective in persuading your legislator. As with legislative visits, do a little research to find out what they care about so your arguments can be most compelling and make sure that your messages are consistent with those your library system is utilizing.

Personalize your letter: Tell your elected why the issue is of concern for his/her community. Include a personal story that shows how this issue affects your community and/or you personally. Human stories are the most compelling way to engage support for your position: show the human factor and back it up with data.

Personalize your relationship: If you've voted for the person, supported their campaign with time or money, or have a personal or business relationship say so. The closer the elected feels to you, the more powerful your argument is going to be.

You are the expert: It's your job to educate them. It's their job to represent you. You will know more about the subject you're advocating (most of the time) than they will. Be firm. If you need to gather more information, do so. You represent the library: the information resource of your community.